

(RE)MARKS OF ABUSE: GENDER VIOLENCE IN ART BY WOMEN OF COLOUR

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In 1973, Cuban American artist Ana Mendieta invited friends and fellow students to witness a performance piece staged at her Moffit Street apartment in Iowa City, USA. Upon entering Mendieta's slightly ajar front door, viewers witnessed her body, naked from the waist down, smeared with blood, bent over, and tied to a table. Referencing the recent rape and murder of an Iowa University student by a fellow student, Mendieta's performance *Rape Scene 1973 Moffit Street, Iowa City, Iowa*, made direct connections between gender and sexual violence, a victim's gendered and racialised body, and the emotional impact of trauma. Mendieta's 'direct identification with a specific victim meant that she could not be seen as an anonymous object in a theatrical tableau. Her performances presented the specificity of rape, through which she hoped to break the code of silence that renders it anonymous and general, denying the particular and the personal'. (Reckhitt & Phelan 2001: 98) Mendieta's use of her own body makes specific remarks on violence against women of colour. In addition, the setting of Mendieta's apartment impacted her audience on an intimate level, and reminded them of their physical proximity to the issue of rape on college campuses. Indeed, she directs attention to the concept that rape most often happens in the private sphere, unlike the public dark alleyways often depicted in media.

Gender and sexual violence are persistent and long-standing issues that span across race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, sexuality, ability, and geographic location. Throughout history, patriarchal systems and institutions, such as the family, positioned women as the property of their husbands and subject to his rule and discipline, and very few, if any, social services were available to domestic abuse survivors prior to the 1970s. (Summers & Hoffman 2002: xiii) Also problematic are rape laws prior to the 1970s law reforms that were embedded with sexist assumptions and doubt towards the seriousness of rape. (Bryden & Lengnick 1997: 1197-98) Furthermore, while themes of domestic abuse and rape had appeared in women's art prior to the 1970s, on the whole, these issues remained invisible in the public eye. Karen McIntyre comments that '[u]p until the 1970s, representation of abused women was rare in the public arena. Abuse was not discussed publicly, or if it was, it was from a medical, clinical perspective—what went on in the privacy of

people's homes stayed there'. (2015: 64) One example of an early occurrence of domestic abuse in art is Alice Neel's 1949 painting *Peggy*. Neel paints her neighbour, Peggy, awkwardly leaning back against cushions gazing past the viewer with a bruised and cut face. A victim of domestic violence, Peggy later died of an overdose of sleeping pills. (Bauer 2002: 388) Japanese performance artist Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*, first performed on 20 June 1964, at the Yamaichi Concert Hall, Kyoto, Japan, also touches on themes of violence against women. Seated in front of her audience with a pair of scissors placed in front of her, Ono invites audience members to come up one at a time and cut away a piece of her clothing to take with them. While the work has multiple interpretations (e.g., comments on WWII, remembrance, and memorialisation), *Cut Piece* also makes strong ties between women's bodies and vulnerability. (Bryan-Wilson 2003:103) As American and international feminist artists began to shed light on this hidden issue, works that abstracted the issue by removing the body became more prominent in visual art. For example, Suzanne Lacy, an early American feminist artist whose work dealt with the issue of rape, gradually moved away from the physical presence of the body in these pieces. One of her early performances that dealt with the subject of women's victimisation, *Ablutions* (1972) (alongside Judy Chicago, Sandy Orgell, and Aviva Rahmani), was presented in June 1972 in Venice, California and involved a performance of images such as women bathing in eggs, clay, and blood while another seated woman is being bandaged. However, Lacy's subsequent works moved away from the body as an important component in challenging rape culture. Her 1972 artist book *Rape Is*, provided textual descriptions of what constitutes rape and different forms of sexual, emotional, and physical harassment that women experience. Five years later, she produced *Three Weeks in May* (1977), a three-week-long series of events that brought attention to the high occurrence of rape in Los Angeles. This work was comprised of several components, including a large map of the Los Angeles area that was stamped with the word 'RAPE' in red ink on the approximate rape sites reported to the Los Angeles Police Department. (Kelley 1995: 236) In addition, the event included guerrilla-style activist art that marked out in white chalk the outline of a woman's body in the approximate site where a rape had occurred with the label 'A woman was raped near here...' (Kelley 1995: 237) In both the map and the chalk outlines, physical bodies are only referenced, and become abstract concepts in the issue of sexual assault.

Subsequent feminist works continued the discussion of violence against women, and brought the physical body back into the work; however, the work itself most often centred on white women's own bodies and, thus, their experiences. Take, for instance, Nan Goldin's photograph titled *Nan one month after being battered* (1984) and Sue Williams' sculpture *Irresistible* (1992). While Goldin's photography primarily focused on topics of LGBTQ identity, addiction, and AIDS through her friend group in the New York City party scene, her self-portrait records her beaten face only just beginning to heal after being assaulted by her boyfriend, Brian. Williams' sculpture represents physical violence by depicting a woman lying bruised on the floor, with words scrawled onto her flesh referencing her victimisation. On one hand, Goldin and Williams' works serve to re-record gender violence onto women's bodies. On the other hand, as Topaz et al.'s 2019 study of eighteen U.S. art museums demonstrates, the most represented artists in terms of gender and ethnicity are white men (75.7%) and white women (10.8%). (2019: 9) Thus, the tendency for art institutions to privilege the work of white artists only results in the representation of white women's bodies. When only one group of victims/survivors are represented (i.e., cisgender white women), the concerns of other victims/survivors are ignored (i.e., women of colour, gender non-binary people, and transgender women). While I am not arguing that Goldin, Williams, and Lacy's works fail to contribute to addressing the issues of gender and sexual violence—indeed, their works help lay the foundation for feminist art that involves autobiography, political action, and social awareness—I do identify the historical and contemporary need to broaden the perspectives on the issue of violence and abuse to include feminist artists of colour. Feminist artists of colour can offer perspectives on the issue of gender and sexual violence that consider the impact of gender and race within the scope of the issue.

Considering the complexity of the problem, it is clear we need a multidimensional approach to tackling the issue of gender and sexual violence. An important step in illuminating the complexity of abuse is to understand that victims/survivors will experience abuse and its after affects differently, depending on their social location (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, citizenship status, and ability) and relationship with social institutions. To do this work, intersectional theory, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color' (1991), can be employed. In this seminal work, Crenshaw argues that people exist within several overlapping social locations (e.g.,

gender, race/ethnicity, ability, socioeconomic class, sexuality, nationality, religion, and age) and are shaped by the interaction of these locations within social institutions (e.g., law, policy, education, family, media, and religious organisations). Through these interactions, individuals and groups experience privileges and oppression based on practices such as colonialism, imperialism, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, and ableism. In other words, any given social issue is a result of several different factors, and affected individuals will experience the issue differently based on their treatment by social institutions. Feminist artists of colour's work that adopts an intersectional lens can contribute to more complex depictions of the victim/survivor experience, and heighten their audience's awareness of the issue.

In the following pages, I examine contemporary feminist artists of colour whose work directly tackles the issue of gender and sexual violence through artwork that employs an intersectional lens. Specifically, I investigate the ways feminist artists of colour use their art to highlight people of colour's experiences as victims/survivors of abuse, involve the viewer in discussions of gender and sexual violence, and implicate social institutions that support abusive climates. Following my analysis of the artwork, I note directions for further research on intersectional visual art dealing with issues of gender and sexual violence. To conclude, I consider how feminist of colour visual art can contribute to social justice efforts in raising individual and community awareness of gender and sexual violence by educating the audiences on more complex and intersectional aspects of abuse, positioning the viewer as a witness to the artist's message, and transforming the audience's understanding of abuse. Such contributions help to further advance the understanding of gender and sexual abuse as an intersectional issue.

Feminist Artists of Colour's Intersectional Visual Art on Gender and Sexual Violence

Contributions from feminist artists of colour help diversify representations of victim/survivors that invite critical conversations surrounding abuse to include people of colour. Indeed, gender and sexual violence occurs across all genders, races, cultures, sexualities, economic classes, nationalities, religions, ages, and abilities. Chinese performance artist Li Xinmo is a 'controversial and rebellious feminist artist in the contemporary art scene in China, who bases her art on her painful experience, refers mainly to body performance and examines the relationship between performance and

film, between performance and painting' (Xu 2012) and whose work involves 'protest and the propagation of personal ethics'. (Goodman) In her *Feminist Photography Series* from 2012, Li blends photography, digital manipulation, and text to create images that investigate Chinese women's feelings towards contemporary society and how, in turn, contemporary society views women. While some images depict a woman's anguish through a close-up of her screaming face, in other images she is quieter and more thoughtful. One photograph of a woman gazing at her reflection captures this more subdued tone. In the image, we see only the woman's hands holding the mirror that reflects one half of her face. Perfectly manicured hands contrast sharply with her battered reflection. The woman's head is placed into sharp relief by the black garment draped around her neck, which reiterates the mirror's black ornate frame and serves as both a point of contrast and a prison with which to encase her reflection. By featuring a Chinese woman as a victim of physical abuse, Li draws attention to the issue of interpersonal violence both within China and on a global level.

While drawing attention to the intersections of gender and race through her subject, Li's composition invites the viewer into the conversation on physically abusive relationships. The closely cropped image reveals little of the areas surrounding the mirror, except for the hands that hold it and a blurred, indistinguishable object in the background. The cropping forces the viewer to focus on the hands, whose long fingers lead us back to the face. The bruised face is slightly blurred, though not as much as the background, thus softening the angry red contusion on her mouth and developing bruise under her eye. Her expression is vacant and does not meet the viewer's gaze. Just to the right of her eye, the words 'I AM YOUR MIRROR,' in white type, trail vertically down her cheek. While the white hue of the text blends into the pale features of the woman's face, the words are jarring. 'I AM YOUR MIRROR' is a literal statement, since the words appear in a mirror. Taken figuratively, the words could, on one hand, reflect the woman's isolated state of victimisation, that which she may try to hide from others but cannot escape in her own reflection. On the other hand, 'I AM YOUR MIRROR' could reflect the audience's own involvement with an abusive relationship, either as a victim/survivor, perpetrator, or as witness to the abuse occurring in the photograph and in society.

The central placement of the mirror and close cropping force the audience to view the woman's face in a way that gives us the potential to experience this scene. The composition operates similarly to Edouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, whereby the careful composition of the figures, mirror, and gazes casts the viewer into a key role in the painting. By looking into Li's photograph, we peer into a mirror that reflects society's position within the issue of physical abuse against women. Although Li's art comments on experiences directly connected to Chinese society, her image adopts a self-reflexivity of postmodern art that prompts us to consider the differences, as well as commonalities, between victims/survivors. Since gender and sexual violence is a global issue, this could be the story of a woman from any nation or culture.

Another prominent sign in Li's photograph is the bruise. As an indexical sign, the bruise is a signifier of being beaten, a physical marker that abuse has taken place. Bruises as a record of abuse also feature in Black South African photographer, Berni Searle's photographic series *A Darker Shade of Light*. In these photographs, Searle photographs her own bruised body marked by sexual abuse, in keeping with the aforementioned white feminist traditions. (Miller 2005: 40) By using her own body, physically marked by gender and race, Searle employs an intersectional lens to create visual commentary on gender and sexual violence in South Africa. Indeed, an intersectional approach is necessary to fully understand the issue since, according to Alicia Gill, 'often missing from our research and analysis of gender-based violence is its connection to other interlocking and mutually reinforcing systems of oppression, power and inequity'. (2018: 559) In a study of how artists have addressed the topics of truth and trauma in South Africa both during and after apartheid, Kim Miller notes that *A Darker Shade of Light*, 'challenges the historical invisibility and silencing of South African women, not only during apartheid and within the scope of the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Committee], but also in the present day. (2005: 40, 47-48) In featuring bruises in her photographs, which are meant to speak to the concept of abuse within an oppressive institution rather than a specific event, Searle transforms her own Black woman's bruised body into a symbol of collective trauma. (2005: 47)

While Li's and Searle's photographs freeze in time the aftermath of abuse in a single moment that audiences can contemplate, performance art enables the viewer to experience an artwork across a span of time. On 2 September 2014, American multiracial artist Emma Sulkowicz began their senior thesis piece, titled *Mattress*

Performance (Carry That Weight). A victim of rape by a fellow Columbia student, Sulkowicz's performance was an embodiment of the trauma and emotional weight they were left with after the assault. The performance consisted of Sulkowicz carrying their dorm mattress, on which the rape occurred, with them wherever Sulkowicz traveled to on campus. The rules of engagement they set for the piece required them to carry the mattress on campus, store it in a safe place when leaving campus, and accept help carrying the mattress only if it was offered. (Mitra 2015: 386) Referred to as an endurance performance artwork, *Carry That Weight* consisted of several parts: murals on the wall of their Columbia University studio; objects, such as their mattress, mattress covers, and winter gloves; rule of engagement for the performance; public responses; and a diary. (Sulkowicz 2014)

Sulkowicz's own body bestows an intersectional lens to the work, which connects their assault to a specific person, place, and time. As a young, gender-nonbinary, queer, multiracial college student, Sulkowicz expands the typical gender binary associated with sexual assault and opens the conversation surrounding gender and sexual violence to include multiracial individuals and broaden the scope of locations in which abuse takes place. Sulkowicz's social location thus serves to invite a wider audience to personally connect with their work. In addition to their body, the mattress serves as a symbol and record of their trauma. A mattress, which usually signifies rest and comfort has been tainted through sexual assault, and now comes to symbolise the weighty trauma to which Sulkowicz is now tied. As Shayoni Mitra (2015) notes, 'The mattress, as externalised representation of pain cannot be last accessed as an archive of trauma unless it is activated by the gestures of carrying'. (389) Indeed, the act of carrying such a weight embeds this meaning within the mattress.

Carry That Weight touches on the physical, emotional, and temporal aspects of the aftermath of sexual assault. Physically, carrying around a mattress throughout their movements on campus is a challenging task. As Mitra comments, '[t]he mattress in Sulkowicz's project is heavy, awkward, and portable; an object chosen for its ungainly but solid dimensions'. (2015: 388) Not only can the mattress itself be unwieldy in its size and weight, carrying the object throughout campus, inclusive of tight and/or crowded spaces, up and downstairs, and through various weather conditions, makes the task more arduous. Emotionally, the performance serves as a constant reminder of

their rape, and the marks that trauma leaves on one's psyche. *Carry That Weight* takes a private wounding and makes it visible to public audiences. Indeed, *Carry That Weight* demonstrates art's capabilities to do work outside of the traditional walls of a museum or art gallery. Sulkowicz not only performs the weight they continued to bear, but also with a high degree of vulnerability that is witnessed by numerous people at the university. Temporally, the performance was planned to last until their assaulter was expelled from Columbia's Morningside Campus. (Mitra 2015: 386) Dependent on the university's actions, Sulkowicz could have performed their piece for a day, week, or the entire academic year. Ultimately, their assaulter was not expelled, and Sulkowicz carried out the performance through to graduation, finally ending on 27 May 2015. In tying the performance duration to Columbia's course of (in)action, Sulkowicz indicates the direct role social institutions, such as the education system, has in addressing the issue of sexual assault. Such inactions indicate the educational institution's complicity in a culture that ignores sexual assault and silences victims/survivors.

The weight Sulkowicz both literally and physically carries is heavy, exhaustive, and difficult to manage. However, the terms of their performance piece allow volunteers to help carry the mattress. In these moments, when other students volunteer to help Sulkowicz 'carry that weight' or, sometimes momentarily take it off their hands completely, the burden becomes lighter. In joining Sulkowicz's performance piece, other college students voiced their own concerns about rape on college campuses. An individual record of trauma becomes a larger call out against rape, assault and the injustice felt by college students who are often not supported by the university that they feel should protect and care for them. Thus, *Carry That Weight* also symbolises allyship and collective action. The allyship associated with *Carry That Weight* ranges from a few individuals, as seen in images of Sulkowicz's performance when fellow students help them carry the mattress, to larger projects that emerged from the performance. Indeed, as Mitra notes:

On 29 October [2014], less than eight weeks later, an (Inter)National Day of Action was coordinated on this New York City campus [Columbia University] by activist groups like Carry that Weight Together, No Red Tape, Student Worker Solidarity, and broader women's rights and gender justice groups, including Hollaback and UltraViolet. Reports of the day stated that 130 schools across five

countries, with the largest number of participants at fellow American universities, staged 'collective carries' of mattresses and pillows, rallying around survivors of sexual and domestic violence. (2015: 386-87)

Thus, the groups that organised demonstrations also employed the symbol of the mattress, which helped the movement that Sulkowicz began to grow.

Raising awareness about rape and sexual assault through performance art with an intersectional lens is also the focus of Cherokee artist Luzerne Hill's 2012 performance *Retracing the Trace*, at the Fine Art Museum, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC. Like Sulkowicz, Hill draws on her own experience as a rape survivor to inform her performance that speaks to rape on a national level. At the beginning of *Retracing the Trace*, Hill lies on the gallery floor and has 3,780 red khipu style Incan knots poured on top of her body. Khipu knots were used by Incas as devices for record-keeping and communication. Rising from the khipu knots, Hill leaves an impression of where her body has been, similar to the mark of her presence in the park where she was assaulted in 1994. (Armani 2017) In the 60 following hours, Hill takes each individual knot and tacks them to the gallery wall to form a ring around the room. (Armani 2017) Like Sulkowicz's performance that employs a highly symbolic object, Hill is careful to recognise each knot, which in total represents the number of rapes that go unreported in the United States in one 24-hour period. Hill's performance is especially relevant given the increased vulnerability of Native women, who are three times more likely to be victims of sexual violence (90% of the time by non-Native men). (Armani 2017) In a similar vein, Métis Canadian artist Jaimie Black's *REDress Project* raises awareness of the more than one thousand missing and murdered Indigenous women of Canada, by installing red dresses in public spaces to signify their absence. (Black 2020) By adopting an intersectional framework, Hill's performance and Black's installations acknowledge many factors that impact victim/survivors' experiences of violence and abuse. As Alicia Gill notes:

due to complex, often antagonistic histories with varied systems and institutions, some communities are at higher risk of experiencing violence in their lifetimes and have a more difficult time accessing the life-saving resources they need to get and stay safe, and to heal. Survivors of colour and Native survivors, LGBTQIA

survivors, survivors with disabilities, and survivors who live at the intersections of all of these identities often experience compounded instances and impacts of violence. (2018: 560)

Thus, when we take note of what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) refers to as the ‘matrix of oppression,’ sexism is made more complex through interactions with racism and colonialism to not only render Native women more vulnerable to violence, but also less likely to receive the institutional support needed to leave the abusive situation and heal from abuse.

In Sulkowicz and Hill’s performances, the physical spaces that performances occupy add to the power of the pieces, and how audiences can view and/or participate in the work. Set within the gallery walls, Hill’s performance is much more intimate compared to the expansive Columbia campus that encompassed that of Sulkowicz. Hill transforms the space through the act of pinning khipu knots to the gallery walls, and invites participants into a red-ringed contemplative space. Sulkowicz also enabled audience participation (those who volunteered to help them carry the mattress) and transformed their space by inspiring social justice groups to organise against violence and abuse. Thus, Sulkowicz and Hill demonstrate the importance of their physical bodies in relation to the audience and performance space in creating powerful works that speak out against sexual assault.

Directions for Future Research

Reflecting on the works discussed above, I note additional intersectional sites that can further diversify a visual dialogue on gender and sexual abuse, such as socioeconomic status and ability. Financial abuse inhibits a victim/survivor from leaving an abusive relationship and, because the intersection of race, gender, and economic class produces compounded oppressions, artwork that considers socioeconomic status can produce more nuanced understandings of abuse. In addition, people with disabilities are an especially vulnerable group, one that is often dismissed and ignored. Peggy Munson argues that ableism can enable gender and sexual violence. Emotional, physical, and economic forms of abuse inflicted on a victim with disabilities are often tailored to their disability and manifest differently than those typically understood by advocates and service providers. (2016: 50) Lacking knowledge of the ways disability impacts abusive situations often results in blaming people with disabilities for the

abuse, or denying them services to leave abusive relationships. (Munson 2016: 49-50) Therefore, artwork that engages with these dimensions of abuse would give audiences a better understanding of people with disabilities' situations and the specific services they need. To further expand feminists of colour's visual articulations of gender and sexual abuse, I also note the need to include discussions on emotional and verbal abuse. Another prevalent form of abuse, one often involved in other forms of abuses/violence, emotional and verbal abuse is often under-recognised. This tendency also emerges in contemporary artists' representations of gender and sexual violence. To address this gap in the literature, future research needs to be conducted on the ways emotional and verbal abuse is explored and represented in visual art.

Feminist Artists of Colour's Transformative Engagement with the Audience

Each of these feminist artists of colour make a significant contribution to tackling the issue of gender and sexual violence by centering marginalised populations. In taking an intersectional approach that highlights people of colour, women, and nonbinary victims/survivors, the artworks call upon society to recognise individuals who face oppression in both their personal and public lives. Contributions from feminist artists of colour are important in building a more expansive and complex public understanding of gender and sexual violence that is both contemporary and inclusive. As a society enmeshed in visual culture, images that depict a range of victims/survivors, with regard to gender and race, can impact the way audiences view the scope of abuse. According to Gillian Rose, '[i]mages are important, it seems to me, not simply because, for some people in some places, they are pervasive, but because they have effects. In particular, they have effects in relation to the construction of social differentiation. Different identities, different subject positions, are reiterated, in highly complex ways, by visual images. (2013: 71) The visual component of depicting abuse is important in forming individual and community understandings of abuse. Karen McIntyre argues that in media, accurate representations of gender and sexual violence is necessary to expand the public's understanding of abuse. (2015: 64) Likewise, visual artists can play a role in shaping a more holistic understanding of this scope of violence.

Through composition, content, and medium, artists can compose images that affirm some victim/survivors' experiences and educate audiences on violence and abuse. Speaking of her own and other women's artwork on gender abuse, McIntyre argues

that survivor artwork imagery holds the potential to communicate their message uncompromised:

Exhibiting these works has effected a social change greater than my one narrative, my one perspective. It has opened the door for many other women to disclose their own 'shameful' secrets, started a collective movement of art-making in response to violence (the Women's Art Initiative), and offered media publicity that has privileged the voices of 'victims' over those of other experts and spokespeople. All this from some paintings. (2015: 67)

For McIntyre, artwork can shift power into the hands of victims/survivors by enabling them to speak their truth. Thus, in the work of feminist artists of colour, content and imagery that is centred in marginalised groups' experiences can provide necessary opportunities for artists to speak of their intersectional experiences in a way that can resonate with viewers of colour who may not typically find their issues addressed in the general visual culture. For example, women of colour's artwork shared across social media can reach a much broader audience than artwork exhibited in a gallery, which has a much narrower audience.

Such efforts are necessary given that the public often does not know what constitutes abuse. A survey commissioned by Redbook and Liz Claiborne Inc. (2000 & 2006) reported that many Americans had only a partial understanding of abuse: 40% did not include hitting, slapping, or punching in a list of abusive actions and over 90% did not include repeated emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse as part of domestic violence and abuse. ('News Poll' 2006: 1) This gap in the public consciousness in identifying gender and sexual abuse makes it difficult for bystanders to know when and how to provide assistance. According to the survey, 64% of Americans stated that it is hard to determine if someone has been a victim of abuse, and 54% of Americans believed they may have witnessed IPV but did not act because they were unsure of what they were witnessing constituted abuse. ('News Poll' 2006: 1) As such, it is important to visually represent gender and sexual abuse in ways that discuss nuanced forms of abuse, and represent a diverse group of victims/survivors regarding gender and race. I argue that the feminist of colour artists discussed above help to diversify representations of violence and abuse in the global domain, and through their art/visual/storytelling help

to define the dimensions of abuse. Expressed differently, their intersectional images reveal the scope of violence and abuse by giving voice to a myriad of victims/survivors.

Indeed, the audience's role as witness to these artists' messages is as important as the work itself. Audiences begin engaging with an artwork the moment they observe the piece. Response to a work may take many forms, from examining the work's formalistic qualities, making emotional or cognitive connections to the concept, or physically becoming part of the work. For instance, in Sulkowicz's performance, audience participation increased the power of *Carry That Weight* and galvanised further social action. Engagement with an artwork is valuable to social justice initiatives since, as Amy Mullin notes, 'when we respond to artworks, we focus on what the art reveals about ourselves as well as what it reveals about others. This may sound self-indulgent, but it can facilitate an increase in critical social consciousness by making us question simultaneously of our own socio-identities as well as those expressed or explored in the artwork'. (2000: 133) Therefore, while art can operate as a vehicle for an artist's personal expression, it also holds space for audiences to be educated and identify with the work.

Visual art can impact one's thinking; images can be used to reify problematic status quo ways of knowing, or to challenge existing notions. To use Patricia Leavy's words, this 'defamiliarisation' can prompt people to look at an idea in a different way and, thus, art is transformational. (2009) These properties may be unique to visual images: '[v]isual art can jar people into *seeing* something differently. This kind of consciousness-raising, unleashed by images, may not be possible in textual form'. (Leavy 2009: 220) Thus, feminist artists of colour's contributions to building an intersectional representation of the scope of gender and sexual violence demonstrate the ways visual art engages in activist efforts by connecting with viewers in order to address social issues and potentially transform society.

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